

# A Foundational Approach to Build and Sustain a Strong People-Focused Culture at the Battalion Level and Below

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The 2019 publication of the *Army People Strategy* outlines fundamental and foundational principles for application across the force to sustain operational readiness. In accordance, senior Army leadership pushes reforms to transform Army-wide culture and climate. Commanders at battalion-and-below-level organizations have the opportunity and ability to creatively employ innovative measures to meet the secretary of the Army’s objectives designed to achieve and maintain total readiness.

The *Army People Strategy* states, “The Army faces many of the same culture challenges as the rest of our Nation: sexual assault, sexual harassment, discrimination, extremism, and suicide. If permitted to persist in the Army, these behaviors can break trust within Army teams—from squads to major commands.”<sup>1</sup> To address these issues, AR 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, and the *Military Implementation Plan: 2023-2025 Army People Strategy* direct subordinate unit commanders to utilize local resources and experts in the field to tailor solutions based on unit needs.<sup>2</sup> Through these policies, local units are encouraged to create new ways to modernize the application of the Army’s goals in line with the *Army People Strategy*.

Army command programs such as the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program, the Equal Opportunity (EO) Program, safety programs, and the Suicide Prevention Program are managed at the battalion level. In addition, each battalion contains a unit ministry team in charge of religious welfare of the soldiers and the spiritual, ethical, and moral well-being of the command. In most cases, junior Army leaders serve in appointed positions as an additional duty to meet program requirements in addition to performing the duties associated with their unit leadership positions. While the Army institutes policy, and commanders are obligated to manage these command programs, the effective implementation of these additional duty positions are critical to creating an environment that fully addresses corrosive behaviors. Too often, these Army command programs lack connection to the formation and rely on one-time initiatives or the individual skills of personnel lacking longevity. As a result, effects are not realized across the organization or maintained past transition of those filling these crucial roles.

The 307th Military Intelligence Battalion (MI BN), an Intelligence and Security Command forward



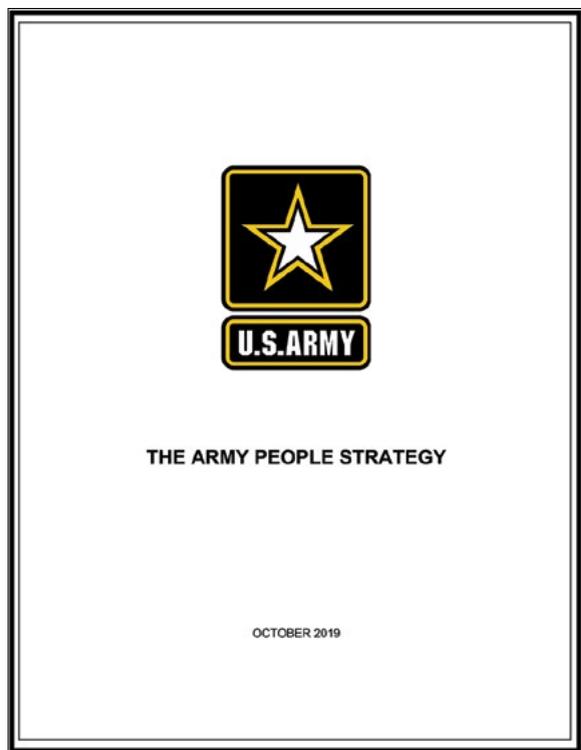
Soldiers from the 307th Military Intelligence Battalion pose with the Titan Cup 2 December 2022 on Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy, after winning the first portion of the 307th Foundation Day. The quarterly Foundation Day effectively targets needed training based on trends in the unit, risk areas associated with the time of the year (e.g., holiday stress, summer safety), and mandatory training of Department of the Army programs. (Photo by Capt. Erik Furgal, U.S. Army)

collection battalion, is a subordinate command of the 207th Military Intelligence Brigade (Theater) stationed in Vicenza, Italy, that has taken an innovative approach to operationalize the vision of the *Army People Strategy*. The battalion implemented Operation Titan Foundation, which relates to the secretary of the Army's fourth objective, "build positive command climates at scale across all Army formations," and fifth objective, "reduce harmful behaviors in our Army."<sup>3</sup> The problem statement addressed in this operation was, "How does the unit build an enduring program to sustain a strong people-focused culture (driven at the team leader level), maximizing all resources available to battalion-level organizations?" The following outlines how the 307th MI BN implemented Operation Titan Foundation and the specific tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that can be applied across other battalion-level commands within the Army.

## The Goal

A strong people-focused culture is a priority and directly affects operational readiness. This includes understanding and helping to overcome an individual's life obstacles. Units acting proactively to prevent escalation of life events into crisis or catastrophe, as well as minimizing corrosive behavior, can sustain the Army's most important resource—its people. Ultimately, the goal of Operation Titan Foundation is to effectively integrate and synchronize people-focused programs across the battalion, in conjunction with the support of local resources, to limit risk to soldiers and sustain operational readiness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Social-Ecological Model for Suicide Prevention (see figure 1, page 98) is a framework that can help others understand the science behind the 307th MI BN's program. The Social-Ecological Model structure outlines factors that influence corrosive behaviors and can be utilized



To read *The Army People Strategy*, visit [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the\\_army\\_people\\_strategy\\_2019\\_10\\_11\\_signed\\_final.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_people_strategy_2019_10_11_signed_final.pdf).

to support the development of prevention strategies.<sup>4</sup> When applied effectively, the model ensures leaders “consider the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors ... to act across multiple levels of the model” simultaneously.<sup>5</sup>

When this model is applied to a typical Army environment and forms the basis of command programs, the interlocking impacts can be realized. Societal impacts create the overlapping base of the model and, in most cases, are influenced by changing norms in American society. Cultural issues around stigmas and identity challenge healthy command climates but are known and must be continually addressed. Communities play an outsized role in battalion-level efforts when resources on local garrisons are sometimes stretched thin. Routine and regular engagements with garrison/community enablers help junior leaders in the Army understand how to rapidly access them to address and reduce high-risk soldier behavior (e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence, suicide ideations, substance abuse). It is important to note that these solutions do not work unless units can build their cultures around individual team members and connected relationships.

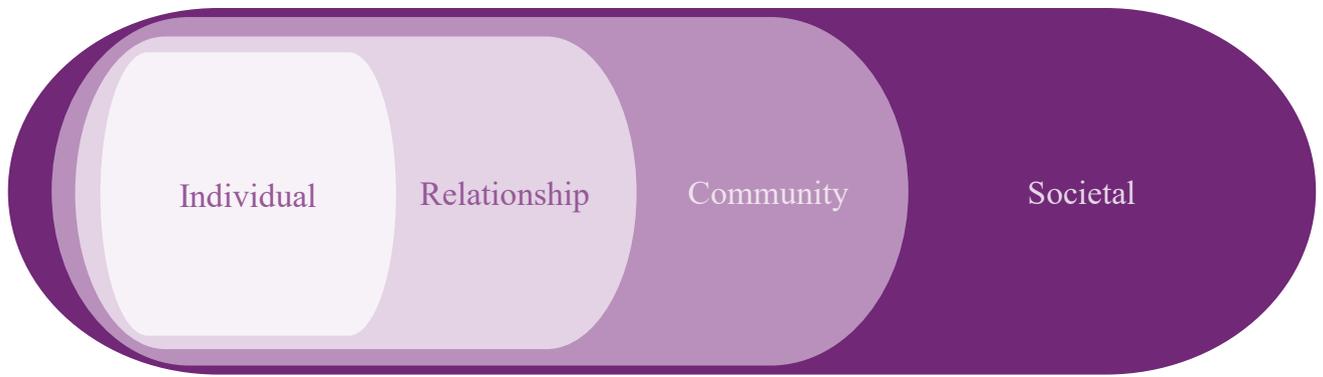
## The Program

To accomplish this, the 307th MI BN created Operation Titan Foundation with the express purpose of operationalizing the synchronization, integration, and focus of command programs to build a strong command climate and enable the battalion’s center of gravity—the intelligence collection team leader—to lead in any environment. The unit has effectively integrated this effort into every facet of the organization’s operations and training. The TTPs developed and guidance given from the battalion leadership are directly in line with Army policy and goals.

Figure 2 (on page 99) outlines the three main pillars of the unit’s effort to ensure that focus remains on command team development and connectivity, education and empowerment of junior leaders, and synchronization of the command programs. Ultimately, the 307th MI BN operation effectively combines organizational management with leadership development and empowerment. The goal is to actualize the Army’s guidance of developing a people-focused culture based on evidence-informed, targeted engagement to sustain the holistic health of the organization.

The programmatic pillars were designed to create a sustainable culture inside the unit; however, an important step sometimes skipped is defining the target culture. Figure 3 (on page 100) outlines how the 307th MI BN defined its target culture and shaped preventive measures and organizational processes to maintain its “strong people-focused” culture. While not necessarily groundbreaking, this simple step ensured command programs remained focused on the most critical aspects of the target goal of unit culture as well as the associated command climate attained at echelon. More importantly, the assessment framed the program for junior leader understanding and professional development.

Titan Foundation, combined with unit risk inventories and command climate surveys, minimized the impacts of corrosive behavior and increased mission, soldier, and family readiness across the board. As highlighted in figure 3, the target culture of the unit is the strong people-focused culture every leader wants to achieve in their formations. This culture relies on the program’s three main pillars to ensure sustainment through time and continual leader transition. To mitigate risk to soldiers implementing this foundational operation, command teams must remain decisively engaged in junior



(Figure from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

## Figure 1. The Social-Ecological Model

leader empowerment, sustaining unit training management integration, massing Department of the Army programs, and leveraging research on training and prevention. The program emphasizes increased harmonization between leaders at echelon and garrison enablers.

Pillar 1, “Command Team Development and Connectivity,” focuses on five main objective areas and applies measures to mitigate risk behavior, synchronize foundational training within unit training

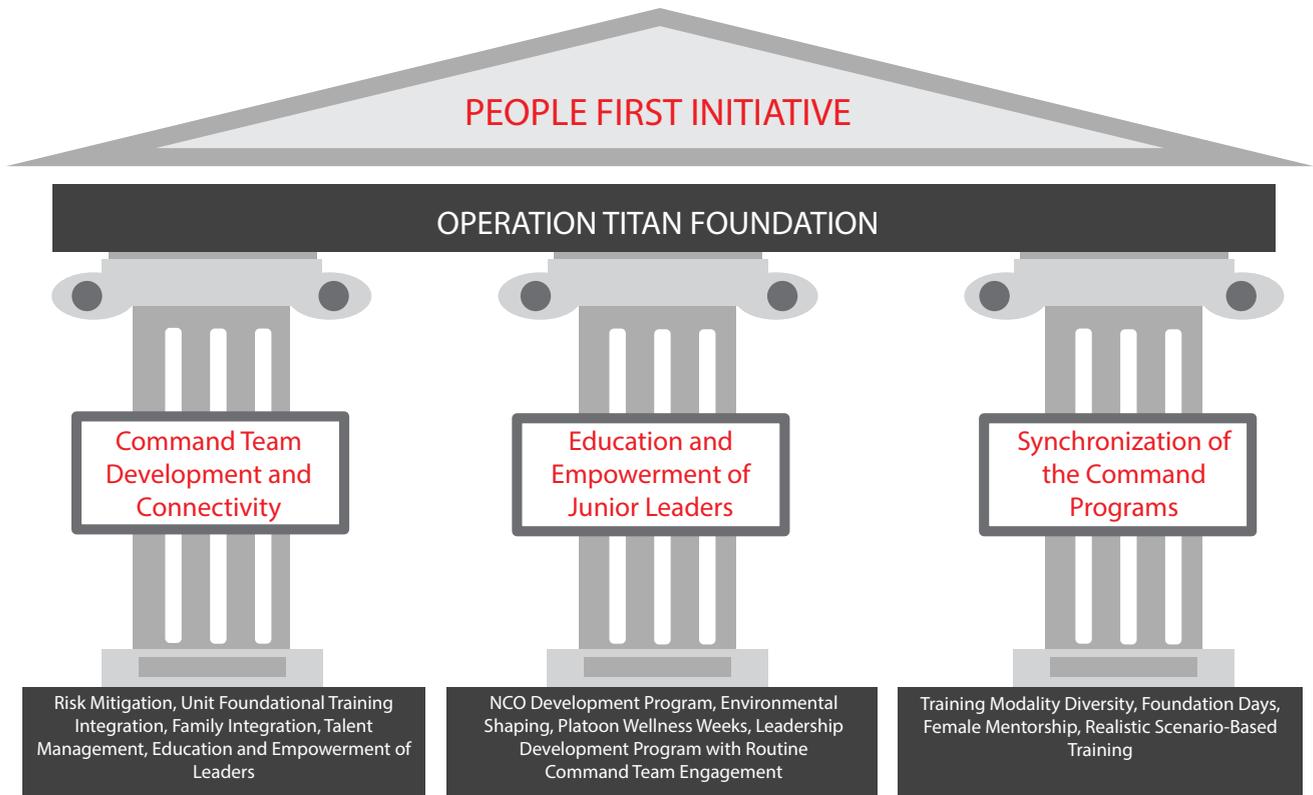
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management, connect families, and manage individual talent. As an example, the 207th Military Intelligence Brigade (Theater) offers the “Lightning Combine” for captains, like the Battalion Commanders Assessment Program, to compete for company command with the intent of developing these leaders for the rigors

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(Figure by Dr. Rob Morgan)

**Figure 2. Pillars of Effort**

of command and choosing the right personnel for the correct company-level leadership positions.<sup>6</sup> Command team development and connectivity are paramount to maintaining emphasis while building a foundational operation. Choosing the right leadership at the company level is vital to building an operation with leader buy-in across all echelons. With the right leaders selected and developed for the correct command position, a deliberate effort is made to continually engage junior command teams to ensure command emphasis remains on cultural sustainment.

Pillar 2, “Education and Empowerment of Junior Leaders,” focuses on four main objectives: NCO development, environmental shaping, platoon wellness weeks, and leader professional development sessions with command team involvement. These objectives are used to ensure that leader development programs are codified, the unit environment remains conducive to good order and discipline, and routine command team engagements occur at echelon to reinforce the cultural narrative. The understanding of the soldier has always been essential in the history of warfare. To that effect,

an essential defining characteristic of strong unit culture is a team leader’s ownership of caring for soldiers beyond training them in basic soldier tasks.

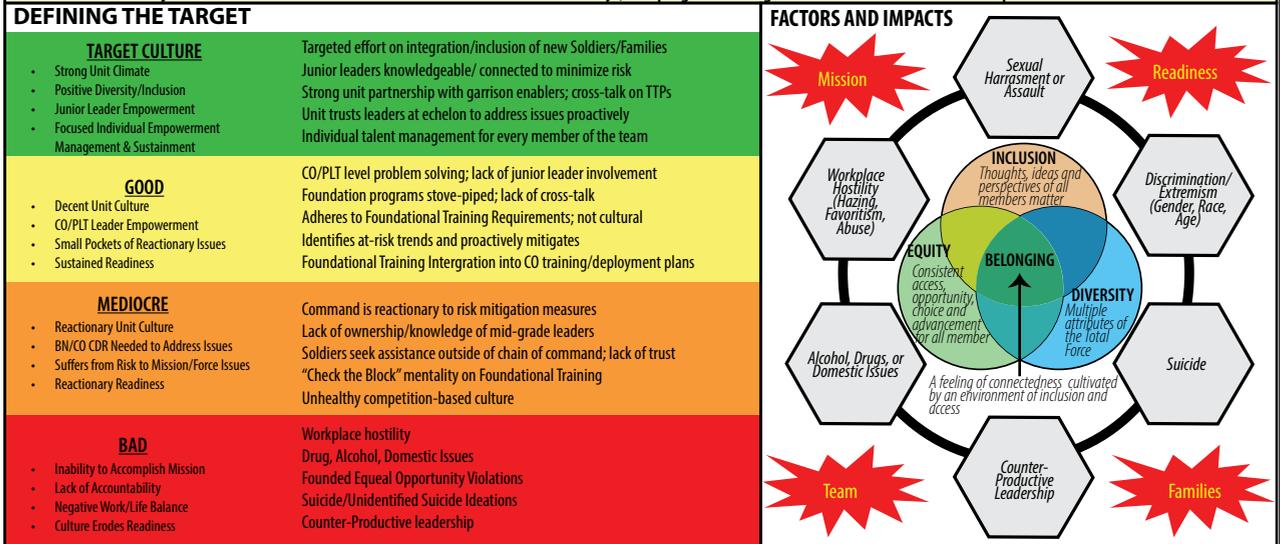
Ownership involves leadership at the platoon to team-leader levels to identify and act on risk factors impacting soldier readiness outside of physical readiness. It must be a body-and-mind-care effort. Soldiers and leaders in the organization are expected and encouraged to support and utilize the Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness program. Additionally, team leaders must be trained to be the first line of defense in their soldiers’ holistic health and wellness. These actions can include identifying a soldier suffering from mental health issues, having the awareness and emotional intelligence to identify a soldier disconnected from their support network, or cueing onto relationship issues requiring external support by garrison enablers. The Holistic Health and Fitness program expands the readiness paradigm to include “how Soldiers think, feel, and interact with their environment.”<sup>7</sup> Outside of preventing and reacting to risks, it is important team leaders are incorporating goal setting,



# 307TH MI BN - OP TITAN FOUNDATION



**BLUF:** The intent of the OP TITAN FOUNDATION is to effectively synchronize, integrate, and focus command programs (SHARP, EO/EEO, CFRR, Suicide Prevention, UPAR, Chaplaincy, and Safety) to build towards a strong Command Climate and enable the BN's Center of Gravity - the Collection Team Leader - to lead in a deployed environment. In conjunction with Unit Risk Inventories and Command Climate Surveys, this program is designed to maintain the best climate possible.



(Figure by Lt. Col. Mike Blue and Capt. Ashley Barber)

### Figure 3. Defining the Target Culture

individual program development, and team building in their training.

Pillar 3, “Synchronization of the Command Programs,” is probably the most important aspect at a battalion level. As previously stated, command programs tend to become stovepiped and redundant due to a lack of communication or understanding by the additional-duty soldiers or garrison enablers to promote interactions between programs. In evaluating high-risk soldiers, issues tend to cross over multiple programs and require cross talk between managers to determine the best course of action.

Instead of further breaking down every component 307th MI BN executes in each pillar of Titan Foundation, there are four specific TTPs that the battalion has determined could be replicated across the force to harden individual unit programs designed to build solid and people-focused climates.

## TTP #1: Titan Risk Reduction Board

Most units across the Army conduct moderate and high-risk soldier boards to discuss mitigation measures at the individual level. Typically, these discussions occur between battalion command teams and owning

company command teams, focusing on resources to support the affected owning unit. To make at-risk soldier boards more effective and increase experiential learning, the battalion created a more inclusive practice of mitigating at-risk soldier behavior.

To achieve the integration of leadership development, risk mitigation, and garrison resource utilization into a traditional battle rhythm event, the battalion established a monthly at-risk board chaired by the battalion command team and managed by the battalion executive officer and unit ministry team. The board includes all company command teams, unit leaders serving in foundational additional-duty positions, and enablers within the brigade and garrison (behavioral health, Military and Family Life Counseling Program, and Army Substance Abuse Program) to discuss methods and programs to deliberately support at-risk soldiers identified across the command.

Compared to other programs, the new board discusses soldiers experiencing a risk event in an open forum to ensure that company-level leadership adapts to the lessons learned from other command teams dealing with similar at-risk behavior. This system leverages the concepts of social learning theory—effectively

307th MI BN TITAN RISK REDUCTION BOARD											
	RANK/NAME:		AGE:		OVERALL RISK ASSESSMENT						
	MOS:		TIME IN SERV:		APPROVED LEVEL (BN CDR)	RECOMMENDATION	MODERATE				
	CO:		SECTION:								
	DUTY POS:		TIME IN POS:								
	TIME IN UNIT:		TIME DEPL:								
	LAST DEPL:		LOCATION:								
	RESIDENCE:										
SUPPORT STRUCTURE											
SUPERVISOR:		SPOUSE (TIME MARRIED):		CHILDREN NAME (AGE):							
BATTLE BUDDY:		TITAN HOBBIES:		FAMILY LOCATION:							
UNIT MEMBER'S GOALS											
ASSESSMENTS	DISCIPLINE/LEGAL		OCCUPATIONAL		WEAPONS		RELATIONSHIPS		FINANCIAL	SUBSTANCE ABUSE	BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
	HIGH		LOW		LOW		MODERATE		MODERATE	MODERATE	HIGH
	HEALTH AND WELLNESS (PROFESSIONAL)										
	TYPE	CASE MGR		START DATE	APPTM FREQ	MEDICATIONS		PLAN OF ACTION/WAY AHEAD			PROF ASSESSMENT
ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS					LEADER LOG: EVENTS/ ENGAGEMENT/ COMMANDER'S ACTIONS (DA 4833 / DA 5248)						
DATE OF CHAPTER		DATE		ACTION / EVENT		CONTROL PERSON		COMMENTS			
CHAPTER TYPE											
DATE OF FLAG											
FLAG TYPE											
DATE OF BAR											
MEB/ # OF DAYS											
ETS DATE											
DEROS DATE											
NOTES:											

(Figure by Lt. Col. Mike Blue)

**Figure 4. Risk Reduction Board**

increasing the depth and speed of leader development.<sup>8</sup> To mitigate the potential ramifications of sensitive information becoming widespread knowledge, the unit created a sanitized care card format and set business rules to protect at-risk soldier's identities (see figure 4). The care cards help unit commanders track changing risk assessments, relevant demographic data, activated resources associated with the case, and leadership connectivity through time. The format also ensures that at-risk cases are effectively transitioned during a change of command, and historical data is retained for continuity of care and action.

This inclusive board format accomplishes three significant tasks: (1) helping commanders organize concerning variables to present to the battalion commander, (2) cueing junior leaders to engage across multiple domains and resources to support soldiers experiencing risk events, and (3) acting as a primer for other commanders to address similar behaviors in their formation. Tangible results from over a year of at-risk board execution has led to a dramatic decrease in at-risk

behavior across the battalion. Due to the program's success, the at-risk boards now fully incorporate all battalion- and company-level command teams across the brigade to ensure a greater shared understanding of issues faced and optimize the utilization of low-density garrison resources to support the entire brigade.

In addition to what has been previously outlined, the monthly risk reduction board also is a touchpoint across the command for compliance tracking. At the company level, this board ensures that each command team actively uses the Commander's Risk Reduction Toolkit and forecasts upcoming unit risk inventories to ensure a consistent pulse on the formation is maintained through leader transitions. The board creates a shared understanding of which soldiers across the formation have received formal suicide prevention and intervention-related training to ensure that each dispersed location where soldiers live and work is covered.

Ultimately, this new board process connects all company-level leaders with garrison support resources in an environment designed to help them learn

from their peers, mitigate risk factors, and openly develop strategies using the mass effect of leader dialogue at echelon. Developing leaders of the future requires engagement and connection; this effort has directly increased observational and experiential learning at speed.

## **TTP #2: Titan Foundation Day**

When developing the program, a significant gap in foundational training was identified: company-level leaders were each attempting to resource, conduct, and individually track all Army-mandated training requirements at their level in addition to required military occupational specialty (MOS) training and certification. In response, battalion leadership created a quarterly Titan Foundation Day to effectively target needed training based on trends in the unit, risk areas associated with the time of the year (e.g., holiday stress, summer safety), and mandatory training of Department of the Army programs. Command teams and the Foundation staff coordinate during monthly synchs to ensure Foundation Day meets the current and predicted needs of the formation. In addition, the integration of families and esprit de corps opportunities are used throughout the day to strengthen the unit climate and the organization's well-being.

The first Foundation Friday event started with a three-mile battalion run targeting engagement with families and concluded with the introduction of the Titan Foundation initiative. Following the run, soldiers, civilians, and family members received presentations promoting healthy behaviors from the Caserma Ederle tactical strength and conditioning coaches, the Army Wellness Center, and the unit master resiliency trainer. The battalion then hosted a scavenger hunt around Caserma Ederle, their home base, to familiarize junior leaders with the location and utility of essential resources available in the Vicenza military community. Moreover, the battalion facilitated access for soldiers to easily schedule appointments for services presented during the briefings. The event concluded with lunch provided by the unit chaplain and a leader-led discussion on SHARP/EO-related topics.

The second iteration of Foundation Friday built on the success of the first. The unit gave thanks ahead of Memorial Day by conducting a physical training (PT) event called a "Murph," in honor of Medal of Honor

recipient Lt. Michael P. Murphy. In addition to the PT session, the unit organized a race between the companies to boost healthy competition. It was a chance for the unit to remember past losses and address the stigma about mental health. Personnel discussed challenges associated with depression, trauma, and suicide in the military. The remainder of the morning was spent conducting small group SHARP training following the new Army SHARP modules led by each company commander. The groups discussed scenarios while SHARP representatives, and leaders facilitated questions and answers and supported thoughtful discussion. Each group then discussed their scenario with the larger audience to provide understanding across the formation. The unit ended the afternoon with a cultural integration event focused on creating safe and inclusive environments and honoring Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month with a potluck meal. While the Army celebrates diversity through Army Heritage Month, the unit honors federal observances to drive equality through inclusion. Integrating learned experiences and cross-communication allowed the unit to share and work through different perspectives, resulting in a more informed and bonded Titan formation.

Each Foundation Day has brought new innovative ideas to target at-risk training areas and physical fitness while making it enjoyable for all soldiers. For example, Foundation Days now feature a PT event where companies compete to win the Commander's Trophy. PT events range from pugil stick and combatives tournaments to combat-focused PT. The Foundation staff also introduced trivia and training at stations throughout PT events to reinforce the day's intent and integrate mental fitness into the physical training program. Another concept developed for Foundation Day was the introduction of cultural awareness events in the local community for soldiers and families. This event included a walking tour through the city center of Vicenza with stops at historic locations. At each station, Foundation staff gave short training about their programs as well as the history of the site. The teams, made up of six to eight personnel from all companies, were also provided with information and advice on local mannerisms, local areas to eat, and other recommendations for future visits.

An essential addition to Titan Foundation Day was the integration of the battalion's female mentorship

program, Titan Valkyrie. The goal of Titan Valkyrie was to not only mentor women but also to provide mentorship and training to the entire battalion on issues or biases that can detrimentally affect both men and women. During this training, both males and females were encouraged to discuss their points of view on the different challenges women face. The first topics chosen for the unit to discuss were excerpts from the book *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* by Michael Kimmel.<sup>9</sup> Using provided quotes from the book, the battalion discussed the differences in the upbringing of boys and girls, unfair biases, and the possible impacts to them later in life. It led to a conversation on the differences in treatment some women have faced in their military careers, the nature-versus-nurture argument, and changes made in the Army over the last decade. Comments and responses were given by both males and females and from soldiers across all ranks.

Foundation Days continue to adapt to provide better training with more resources and to target worthwhile discussions among the battalion soldiers with the intent to engage in current and future impacts on unit culture. In addition, it is used to provide companies with a dedicated, predictable day to receive and train the Titan Fundamentals. Over time, soldiers and leaders have become more connected with themselves, each other, their garrison, and the local area, and they have utilized more of the resources allocated to them.

### TTP #3: Foundational Training Integration

For battalion-level and below leaders, time is one of the most precious resources available and requires deliberate management to ensure that all requirements levied on commanders are achieved. It is challenging to fix compounding socially charged, corrosive problems while integrating large-scale programmatic changes to how units train at the company level. Leaders utilizing only one information/experience presentation method by disseminating information restricted to a classroom or through computer-based platforms will only partially address the problems we face as an enterprise and only target limited types of learning experiences. While the Army is shifting to a greater emphasis on leader-led discussions to aggressively address corrosive behavior, company-level units must make these types of discussion natural, practical, and more frequent, not just

limited to one-day events. It needs to be integrated into their unit activities as a pattern of behavior.

Part of 307th's strategy is to adapt the training guidance to "hide training in training." While this adage is not new, the increased focus from command teams has led to small-group-level discussions across the unit that resonate more with soldiers and increase the "relationship level" connection between our junior NCOs and soldiers.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, this small-group-directed emphasis has increased unit-level touchpoints during other mandatory activities like physical fitness events and planned training (e.g., small-arms ranges, MOS-specific training, and sergeant's time training events).

For the 307th MI BN, collective training exercises focus on the certification of junior leaders conducting forward collection in small teams guided by the Military Intelligence Training Strategy (MITS) program. Outside of MITS, for team leaders to succeed in deployed environments, they must also certify their leadership abilities when dealing with crises. To test a leader's reaction to stress and pressure, the 307th MI BN integrated several key MOS-tied training events with conducting ethically based, foundational training in a simulated deployment environment. Through the conduct of MITS Tier 2 (platform) certification and Tier 3 (team) certification, the unit has executed multiple scenarios to develop its teams and team leaders.

The first Tier 3 certification led by the battalion involved two such scenarios. One involved all collection teams traveling through a simulated airport terminal of the country they are tasked to collect in with the possibility of being pulled from security or customs lines for a secondary screening. Soldiers were tested on their ability to react to a high-stress situation, comprehend their limitations according to their mission authorities, and attempt to pass through secondary screening without violating any rules. Each soldier is given an after action review of their performance. The observer coach/trainer analyzes any violations to determine if they were the result of a lack of training or experience or if the soldier knowingly made an unethical decision. Additional iterations have included testing a collection teams' ability to understand their mission authorities and read through all relevant documents related to their mission.

The second scenario tested the soldiers' understanding of the battalion alcohol policy for deployed

soldiers. The soldiers were tasked to attend a meeting that occurred in a place that served alcohol. The person they were tasked to meet with would pressure them to drink alcohol to test their reactions. The goal of these two scenarios in the first Tier 3 Certification Exercise (CERTEX) was to gauge training in specific areas identified as blind spots for collection teams and to be deliberate in asking teams about their authorities before they deploy. These ethical scenarios also assisted in identifying potential red flags in the formation when team leaders deliberately chose to make unethical decisions; these led to command decisions whether the team leader should stay in their position, be counseled, or be removed from specific deployments.

The 307th MI BN's annual Tier 2 CERTEX was designed to assess and certify the ability of the battalion and its companies, operational management teams, and small collection teams to accomplish their wartime intelligence missions. During the three-week certification, several Foundation events served as exercise injects to simulate the reality of suicide prevention, SHARP, EO, and chaplain resource utilization. At the same time, the battalion focused on controlling collection during large-scale contingency operations. Apart from simulating the use of standard operating procedures and checklists most battalions maintain, the integration expanded intelligence-collection soldiers' understanding of resources and support mechanisms while in a deployed environment. One inject included a walk-in role player in distress reporting a sexual assault to a collection team to force the team to shift focus from collection to the essential human response of helping another person regardless of nationality.

Halfway through the CERTEX, the battalion command team and the white cell (exercise support element) executed a missing soldier event with comprehensive safety measures in place. A responsible junior NCO was chosen to simulate the missing soldier. Only specific individuals knew of the missing soldier inject within the simulation, including the company commander, the rear-detachment element, and the soldier's family. Twenty-four hours prior to the start of the missing soldier scenario, the soldier was instructed to initiate subtle cues to indicate a personal internal struggle. Once the soldier was removed from the environment, the unit began conducting the battle drill for a missing soldier. With a clinical psychology

subject-matter expert and the battalion chaplain on hand for support, the battalion command team, the company commander, and the white cell carefully monitored the stress levels of the unit while they began the search for the soldier. This observation and monitoring by supportive enablers allowed the unit to end the scenario appropriately when the training objectives were met and use the on-hand resources for debriefing and emotional support if other soldiers experienced triggers. Comprehensive after action reviews were conducted at the battalion level. Each company led discussions on the missing soldier scenario with the clinical psychologist and the selected junior NCOs to discuss the event, outcomes, and distress indicators, and to answer questions.

Integrating foundational training into certification exercises is essential for everyone from team leaders to battalion staff to be adaptable to various situations and seek help and clarification in ambiguous situations. At the unit level, it is crucial when developing these scenarios to carefully plan, execute, and emplace mitigation measures to ensure soldiers learn the appropriate lessons and to react to any unforeseen trauma that may occur in the process of execution. Additionally, it is vital to have Foundation and garrison experts involved to ensure the scenario is appropriate for what the unit is attempting to test.

## **TTP #4: Holistic Health and Balance Initiatives**

A significant prevention focus of the Department of the Army and essential to the efficient functioning of units is the ability to "promote connectedness."<sup>11</sup> One deliberate target for Titan Foundation is to create balance for our soldiers while using initiatives to improve their holistic health and that of their families. Our Army families play an essential role in the connection of soldiers with their units and are a vital contributing factor to whether a soldier chooses to stay in the Army. The health of a family plays a large part in a soldier's ability to focus on their job and perform at a level needed for the mission. Unit leaders know they must make a deliberate effort to integrate families into the organization from when a soldier is assigned to the unit to when they depart. What is sometimes forgotten is the need to develop/educate our family members as a vital part of the Army's Golden Triangle (leader, friends, family)



Signs are placed on the barracks doors of every soldier in the 307th Military Intelligence Battalion who received formal training in suicide prevention, equal opportunity, or the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program to connect unit members to internal resources and, almost more importantly, to promote a subtle psychological message supporting foundational programs. (Photo courtesy of the authors)

to combat the corrosive distractors we spend so much time on with our soldiers and apply command programs to support our sometimes-overstretched force to achieve balance.<sup>12</sup>

As a deliberate effort, the battalion targeted ways to increase family integration at the beginning of a soldier's tenure in the unit by utilizing a spouse/partner sponsorship program. Spouse/partner sponsorship can help connect spouses within the unit before they even arrive, especially for those coming to units outside the continental United States. A spouse sponsorship program comprises spouse volunteers who make themselves available to answer questions to inbound spouses about the area, provide moving tips, and offer advice to ease the stress of moving to a new location. This program mitigates the challenge of spouses attempting to obtain information through their significant other while the soldier is also working

to understand their new environment through their sponsor, who may or may not have answers for questions related to a spouse's concerns.

There is added value in creating opportunities for spouses to be integrated into unit foundational events. For example, when units bring in garrison enablers like Army Community Services, Family Advocacy, or Finance, it is crucial to bring spouses into the training to normalize spouse interaction with unit members and enablers on the installation. This integration provides spouses with resources on the installation directly while also increasing the time soldiers can spend with their families. Increasing family presence and interactions at unit events also provides an avenue for commanders to have more informal contact with soldiers and families to identify indicators that may display future issues in the formation (e.g., relationship issues, neglect, or health concerns).

Another avenue to increasing family integration is respecting the time soldiers have during their off hours and organizationally supporting the learned behavior of achieving work-life-family balance. The battalion initiated a "blackout policy," setting organizational ground rules to limit work-related conversations and hours to support better health and wellness. No emails, texts, or phone calls are authorized between the hours of 1800 to 0600 during duty days and no contact is permitted during nonduty days. The policy further forces all soldiers (regardless of rank) to leave work by 1800 hrs. The only exemption authority for this policy is the battalion commander. In practice, the execution of the policy only works when commanders remain engaged and enforce the policy. To ensure the policy could functionally work without increasing risk to force, the communications blackout allowed for leader communications, support coordination for operational activities, and commander's critical information requirement reporting. This battalion-level policy is similar to the policy put in place by a former 10th Mountain Division commander. In his policy, then Maj. Gen. Milford Beagle states, "The ultimate aim of this policy is to stimulate the use of Army systems, processes, and doctrine to disseminate information and effectively use our training management processes."<sup>13</sup> Over time, the 307th MI BN policy has helped leaders at echelon force themselves to leave work on time. However, more importantly, it has instilled a process of deliberate communication with those they lead.

Apart from total family balance and health, there must also be a deliberate focus on the health of the single soldiers that reside in the barracks. One of the near-term priorities addressed in the *Army People Strategy* is the need to improve the quality of life in soldier housing.<sup>14</sup> At the unit level, issues identified through trend analysis and directed efforts in making soldiers' voices heard based on anonymous survey feedback identified the barracks as a risk area for soldiers. From adjacent unit corrosive behaviors to soldiers taking risks while intoxicated, the barracks can create risk for soldiers. To mitigate these identified issues and create a safer environment, deliberate efforts at the unit level were made to improve our soldiers' living environments to reinforce foundational principles.

The unit assessed the physical security environment of their barracks and targeted mitigation efforts on access points into the facilities through which unwanted individuals might gain entrance to soldiers' living spaces. Consistent education and engagement were conducted regarding risk behaviors associated with the physical security of the barracks and actions needed to prevent soldiers from opening up themselves and their fellow soldiers to unknown dangers. Increasing leader presence in the barracks during risk time frames has been equally important. Understanding the times soldiers leave and return to the barracks during weekends is vital to ensuring risk behavior is prevented or deterred. Educating NCOs on the importance of evaluating their surroundings and utilizing bystander practices to prevent detrimental behaviors can make a difference in creating a safe environment for soldiers to thrive. Rewarding these positive behaviors through public praise and positive reinforcement in front of a formation helps to show the impacts of leaders taking an interest in soldiers' well-being.

Just as important was the creative approach NCOs responsible for foundational components took to subtly shape the psychological message in the barracks environment. Apart from traditional means like putting up EO/SHARP boards mandated by Department of the Army policy, the unit worked with the local garrison enablers to design door stickers to be placed on qualified support personnel's barracks doors. The stickers were placed on the door of every soldier in the battalion that had received formal training in suicide prevention, EO, or SHARP. This simple effort changed

the barracks environment by connecting unit members to internal resources and, almost more importantly, promoting a subtle psychological message on foundational programs.

Each initiative provided some balance and support for soldiers in the fast-paced environment of military intelligence. The critical learning point for leaders in the battalion was to reinforce them at echelon continuously. Summer permanent-change-of-station cycles can mean renewed stress for families as they prepare to move to a new environment, blackout periods can be lost during periods of heightened activity and require leader engagement to stop violations, and barracks require consistent leadership engagement to ensure problems are discovered and addressed quickly.

## Conclusion

The focus the 307th MI BN has put on improving people-focused culture not only helped decrease our high-risk behaviors but also changed how soldiers view training experiences, increasing their interest and engagement in valuable topics. It changes the nature of SHARP or EO training from being "just another 350-1 classroom requirement" to a way for leaders to build soldiers of significant character who know how to prevent, act, and assist in nebulous situations. A poignant example of this connection across social-ecological domains was an event where one 307th private first class identified suicidal ideations in a friend assigned to another brigade on post. The situation lasted from night until early morning as the soldier kept talking to the struggling friend while getting his leadership involved to assist with the situation. Due to the maturity built at the lowest levels, the young soldier was able to conduct a warm handover of his friend to his chain of command in the early morning hours. The creation of the Foundation Operation is heavily integrated into the unit culture and harmonizes Army programs into how a unit conducts itself daily. The foundational operation has accomplished this fundamental integration in multiple domains, including comprehensive experiential training and programs for suicide prevention and holistic health. As each future program develops, it should be integrated into the foundation model utilizing a diverse set of tools and Army programs to build sustainable initiatives that arm junior leaders

of tomorrow. Each activity planned by the battalion must include a discussion about integrating into current battle rhythm events or pair it with other required training and resource awareness on garrison.

Moving beyond flattened learning experiences to multifaceted, engaged, purposeful learning, the foundational operation is slowly changing the discussion about training and the culture of a unit. ■

## Notes

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